

February 24, 2021

The Honorable Gary A. Winfield  
The Honorable Steven J. Stafstrom  
The Honorable Alex Kasser  
The Honorable Matt Blumenthal  
The Honorable John A. Kissel  
The Honorable Craig C. Fishbein  
Joint Committee on Judiciary  
Connecticut General Assembly  
210 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Chairs Winfield and Stafstrom, Vice Chairs Kasser and Blumenthal, Ranking Members Kissel and Fishbein, and Members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Dr. Linda Mayes. I am the Director of the Yale Child Study Center and Professor of Child Psychiatry, Pediatrics, and Psychology at the Yale School of Medicine. I have training in pediatrics, neonatology, child development, and psychoanalysis. My research focuses on stress-response and regulatory mechanisms in young children at risk, and I use both social psychology and developmental neuroscience perspectives in my work. Speaking in my role as director of the Yale Child Study Center, **I am testifying in support of Raised Bill No. 6321, An Act Concerning Adoption and Implementation of the Connecticut Parentage Act.**

The Connecticut Parentage Act (CPA) will correct harmful gaps in current Connecticut law by aligning the law with current research on parent-child relationships and the ways in which those relationships affect children's development and well-being. Most importantly, the CPA will protect children and enable parents to provide the necessary security for their families.

Since its founding in 1911, the Yale Child Study Center has sought to improve the mental health of children and families, advance understanding of their psychological and developmental needs, and treat and prevent childhood mental illness. Our research covers the molecular biology and neuroscience of stress and adversity and the mental health disorders of childhood and adolescence. We provide advanced clinical training for child psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers. In addition to research and professional training, the Yale Child Study Center provides on-site behavioral health assessments and interventions for children from infancy through late adolescence and conducts several community-based initiatives, in which clinicians work with communities and schools to improve mental health care, education, and the overall well-being of Connecticut children and their families. We see over 3,000 families with 60,000 visits annually.

In 1973, Yale Child Study Center child psychiatrist Albert Solnit, along with Yale law professor Joseph Goldstein and psychoanalyst Anna Freud, published *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child*, a ground-breaking work outlining a child-centered approach to legal determinations in family law proceedings. Highlighting the child's perspective, their approach prescribed that decision makers should safeguard children's relationship with their

“psychological parent.”<sup>1</sup> According to Solnit, Goldstein and Freud, a psychological parent is a person who has a parental relationship with a child, regardless of whether the two are biologically related. Instead, a psychological parent-child relationship arises from day-to-day interactions, companionship, and shared experiences. For many children, a psychological parent is someone other than their biological mother or father. The psychological parent-child relationship is grounded in children’s biological need for safety and care by an adult as described and recognized in attachment theory.<sup>2</sup>

When young children are frightened, stressed, or unwell, their attachment system is alerted. Children in this state will then exhibit proximity-seeking behaviors (e.g., crying or clinging). Psychological parents reliably respond to those behaviors and sensitively address children’s needs. As a result, children gradually develop what researchers call a “secure attachment” to their psychological parents.<sup>3</sup>

In the nearly 50 years since the publication of *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child*, research and clinical practice have expanded our understanding of the psychological parent-child relationship and reaffirmed its importance to children’s development and well-being. Secure attachment relationships implicate children’s ability to modulate stress, explore the world around them, and form new attachment relationships with other people. Studies have shown that loss of or separation from a psychological parent can have a significant negative impact on children’s development. It can decrease children’s ability to trust others, disrupt child development, and increase children’s likelihood of developing behavioral health and substance abuse disorders as adults.<sup>4</sup> In addition, children’s biological need for nurturing, protective relationships or attachments is not limited to a single primary attachment figure; children can and do have more than one psychological parent.<sup>5</sup>

Parentage laws in Connecticut have not kept pace with the research on attachment relationships and their impact on child development. Currently, these outdated laws leave many children without the protection of a legal relationship with their psychological parent(s). The changes proposed by the CPA would allow courts to formalize those relationships, thereby promoting stability in children’s lives and protecting them from the negative consequences that separation from a psychological parent can have on their development and well-being.

For these reasons, I urge the Committee to vote favorably on Bill No. 5178. Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> Goldstein, Solnit, Goldstein & Freud, *The Best Interests of the Child* 12-13 (1996); Albert J. Solnit, *Psychological Dimensions in Child Placement Conflicts*, 12 N.Y.U. Rev. L. & Soc. Change 495, 497 (1983).

<sup>2</sup> J. Bowlby, *Attachment and loss: Retrospect and prospect*, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 52(4), 664–678 (1982).

<sup>3</sup> R. C. Fraley, *A Brief Overview of Adult Attachment Theory and Research*, IL: University of Illinois (2010), at <https://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~rcfraley/attachment.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> K. Kendler et al., *Childhood parental loss and alcoholism in women: A causal analysis using a twin-family design*, *Psychological Medicine*, 26(1), 79-95 (1996); T. Otowa et al., *The impact of childhood parental loss on risk for mood, anxiety and substance use disorders in a population-based sample of male twins*, *Psychiatry Res.* 220, 1-2 (2014).

<sup>5</sup> E.Z. Tronick et al., *Multiple caretaking in the context of human evolution: Why don’t the Efe know the western prescription for child care?* in *The psychobiology of attachment and separation* (M. Reite and T. Field eds., 1985).

Sincerely,

/s/ Linda Mayes

Linda Mayes, MD

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